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ABSTRACT

Staff development programs can help Catholic educators deal with critical problems now facing them. Parochial school teachers must become better able to prepare students to address difficult issues like dwindling resources or eroding morals. They must be given a knowledge of current theories of teaching and learning such as those of Piaget or Erickson. They need to learn about research findings concerning classroom management, reward systems, and conflict resolution. Training programs are needed on reading instruction and special education. Staff development programs addressing these and other contemporary issues must be regarded as an integral part of the educational process. The provisions concerning teacher centers in Title IV-B of the Higher Education Act may make it easier for parochial school teachers to have access to inservice education. The teacher centers provided by these acts must meet the needs of both public and nonpublic school teachers, and representatives of nonpublic schools must be included on their advisory boards. Inservice education centers must be in a place accessible to teachers. An area specialist responsible to the central school office might design programs for a given area. Finally, salary incentives for participating in inservice programs must be provided to teachers. (Author/JM)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT - NEW PRIORITIES FOR A NEW ERA

A paper presented for the NCEA's 75th Annual Convention and Religious Education Conference. St. Louis, Mo. March 28, 1978.

Presenter: Loretta Butler, Ph. D. - Assistant Dean, Fordham University, New York, New York

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ABSTRACT

Title - Staff Development - New Priorities for a New Era

New Priorities for a New Era focused on the critical contemporary problems with which the Catholic parochial schools are confronted. Some of these issues are unique to the parochial schools, while others are shared by colleagues in the public schools. Included among these issues are ethical concerns for a world with diminishing resources, the impact of moral concerns, technology and human interactions. Other issues involved a concern for the teaching-learning process and the relevance of theory and research for today's parochial school teachers.

A program of staff development must be recognized as an integral part of the educational process. Emphases for teachers must be placed on cognitive development of children, the reading process, special education, and the use of research findings. The new Teacher Center legislation proposes an effective delivery system and a vehicle for better collaboration between public and parochial school teachers. Finally, a revamping of the organizational structure as well as inclusion of an incentive system are suggested as changes which would increase the possibility of relevant in-service teacher education for educators in the parochial schools.

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Some Contemporary Problems

During the past two decades substantial changes have taken place in the composition of the Catholic school. Some of these changes are common also to schools in the public sector, and some are unique. The student populations of the Catholic schools have changed; the parents are often working parents leaving children and adolescents with less parental guidance and supervision. Moreover, teachers, both lay and religious, are confronted with problems in the schools - educational, moral, and behavioral - that would have been unthought of a few decades ago. The changes have not happened to the schools in isolation - these changes have impacted the whole of society. There has been a dimunition in religious commitment and a resultant moral decline in society as a whole. The media has become the arbitrator of morals and the model of human behavior and its subtle influences cannot be denied. Research indicates that Americans listen to or watch the media for a minimum of six hours per day, seven days a week; this totals almost as much time as is spent sleeping and considerably more than is spent in schools. Moreover, the cost of Catholic education has made the choice of the parochial school increasingly inaccessible to numbers of Catholic families in these days of high taxes and exhoribitant costs. Finally, the parishes are confronted with mounting costs, declining enrollments, and less support for the Catholic schools.

Given all of the aforementioned factors, consideration must be directed to the faculty in the Catholic schools who are called upon by parish, parents, and school offices to deal with and resolve many of the problems which follow upon these issues. The composition of the faculties of the parochial schools on a national basis has become approximately fifty per cent lay personnel and fifty per cent religious in staffing. In general, the religious are inclined to be slightly older and more experienced, this is particularly true since the number of young persons entering re-

ligious orders has declined. Almost all currently on staff have their bachelor's degrees and many religious particularly at secondary level have master's level degrees. The lay faculty in the parochial schools at the elementary levels tend to be either younger with little experience, or older women who have raised their own families and have returned to the schools. At the secondary levels there tends to be a median age for both religious and lay faculty and there are more male teachers at this level. Since the academic preparation of the teachers and other faculty in the parochial schools appears adequate, or at least comparable to staff in public schools, why then should staff development be considered necessary?

Why Staff Development ?

The past two decades have witnessed an explosion of knowledge. Not only has research become more sophisticated, it has become more accessible. Educational Specialists aided by computers have arrived at new combinations of knowledge and will continue to refine and sort out facts that are relevant to how the human mind learns and how a child processes information. Teachers are practicioners of the knowledge industry, and if they wish their knowledge and practice to continue to have meaning for the lives of students, they cannot rely on old formulas for the presentation of their instruction. It would be impossible in this comparatively short discussion to touch upon all the pertinent issues that have meaning for teachers in research and practice. Some attempt will be made to look at those that are most critical, particularly with reference to teachers in the Catholic schools.

Relevant Areas for Staff Development

1) There is increasing interest in the teaching of ethics, even in the public schools. Society it seems has suddenly become aware that an alienated and godless society has only fostered disaster. There has been heightened insistence upon human rights, upon issues of peace and justice, a new looking at the world - its ownership and its use. And yet, these contemporary issues pale before the choices with which the children and young people in our classes will be confronted in their lifetimes.

Questions of life or death, who shall eat and who shall not have the food, the irrevocable erosion and plunder of our natural resources, will all demand answers of a high moral caliber. Shall the teachers of today fail to recognize their responsibility of preparing children in Catholic schools to address these problems with a belief in God and a concern for his fellow man?

There are increasing opportunities for in-service training for teachers to become familiar with the scope and significance of these problems and to include these issues in their classroom presentations. Under the auspices of the NCEA, and programs by other groups and colleges throughout the country, there are attempts to bring such relevant information to administrators and teachers in schools. They, in turn, can incorporate these vital concerns in their classroom presentation or adapt them for adult education evening sessions with parents and community.

2) A knowledge of the theories of teaching and learning which are critical to the delivery of information in the classroom must be the concern of every teacher and certainly that of administrators. Teachers must become increasingly aware of differences in learning styles and the stages by which learning takes place, particularly in view of the multi-ethnic and interracial classrooms that are characteristic of today's inner-city schools. Theorists such as Erickson and Piaget have provided a base of research which has significant implications for teaching students at the various stages of development. From my own experience with in-service teacher education comes the experience of one teacher whose problem with an individual child's inability to alphabetize rested on the child's lack of understanding of the underlying process of seriation rather than the task at hand. Some teacher familiarity with Piagetian theory would have prevented teacher frustration and the child's feeling of failure. The inability of many students to deal with abstractions in mathematics may well lie in the absence of concrete operational experiences at an earlier developmental level. One secondary parochial school teacher felt that this acquaintance with developmental theory was important not only for herself but also relevant for the students in her secondary level classes who would be parents in the future. She subsequently developed a program of study at the secondary level to acquaint her students with the growth stages through which children pass in their

acquisition of knowledge.

3) Other contemporary issues include the theoretical bases of classroom management, reward systems, and conflict resolution. Knowledge of current research and application of research findings in these areas should be the interest of every teacher who wishes instruction to have an enduring influence on the students she teaches. The process of sequential learning together with the development of organization skills which will enable students to organize knowledge effectively in a world growing constantly more complex. Teacher time expended in becoming acquainted with these underlying concepts will pay dividends in student performance and teacher satisfaction.

4) Teachers, especially those at the secondary levels are strongly committed to the various content areas. Among the different content areas, none is more critical to learning than the process of reading. The inability of students at all levels to read has almost become a national scandal. The Catholic school like their public counterparts must focus attention on providing students with differentiated reading skills -- the ability to process words efficiently, to analyze and organize materials, to read critically. Reading and the ability to perceive meaning from text permeates all subjects and basically facilitates or impedes the meaningful processing of information.

Within the decade, research on the reading process has been the concern of numerous scholars of note. One of the most significant contributers to theories of how children learn to read has been Noam Chomsky of Harvard University. The relevance of his findings for teachers all of whom are confronted with the processing of the written word cannot but be recognized. Teachers in all of the content areas must recognize the relevance of these theories of reading and should work together to incorporate theory into the presentation of reading materials in a coordinated and sequential manner. Again, through personal experience in working with teachers at the secondary level, where one indeed might assume that such interrelationships were impossible, I had the pleasure of observing an interdisciplinary approach used by teachers across several subject areas. Using funding under a New York State mini grant, Title VI, Sec. IV-C, these secondary teachers in a Catholic school in Brooklyn were able to

coordinate their course materials so that an interdisciplinary reading program was sequenced into their course content.

Seeking solutions to the implementation of improved models for teaching reading to all grade levels has become a national priority. The National Institute of Education through its Basic Skills Program has stimulated both basic and applied research on reading. Models of in-service teacher training in diagnostic-prescriptive techniques for the teaching of reading have received extensive funding by the U. S. Office of Education under the Elementary School Auxiliary Assistance Program. Although targeted specifically to minority groups, the diagnostic-prescriptive techniques developed by many of the programs have relevance for the improvement of teaching reading to children at all levels. Before proceeding to a discussion of other issues, it may be worth reiterating the focal role that the ability of student to deal with the reading process has for success in all academic subjects.

Some National Imperatives

It would be logical at this point to consider some national imperatives. These priorities are not the concern solely of the parochial school but they involve issues that the Catholic schools must address. Probably no recent federal legislation has received the national attention and comparatively broad support that P.L. 94.142, Law for the Education of the Handicapped, has received. It states in one of its most essential passages that "every handicapped child shall receive the most appropriate and adequate education in the least restrictive environment"; that this right to an equal educational opportunity is mandated for all handicapped individuals between the ages of 0 to 21; and that the most severely handicapped must be the served first. In essence, the law mandates an individualized educational program for each child and requires parental approval for the child's program and placement yearly. The parent has the legal right to sue the school district if the parent is dissatisfied with the proposed program or rejects the program as not meeting the child's needs. In many instances this has amounted to the 'mainstreaming' of handicapped students, at least for a portion of their school day in the regular public or parochial school classroom. In addition, the law stipulates that each of the various States must present a State plan for the inclusion of

all handicapped children within that State.

The necessity of teachers in the parochial schools receiving special training to work with handicapped students and integrate them in the regular classroom must be immediately evident. There is, in addition, the need for personnel trained to deal with the special services required to supplement the classroom experiences for these special children. Failure to become familiar with the process of designing individualized programs or to become involved in the process of diagnostic-prescriptive learning procedures will immediately exclude the Catholic schools from participation in this major national endeavor. It might be pointed out parenthetically that other nations in the world have similarly moved in the direction of inclusion of the handicapped in the mainstream of their societal systems. In-service training of teachers in the learning of new skills and the design of relevant materials to support such instruction must become one of the important thrusts for the parochial school personnel as it has become for teachers in the public schools.

Another emergent piece of legislation which holds importance for the parochial schools is the Teacher Center legislation. Although this legislation does not deal with the content of in-service education, it has the capacity to provide increased access to in-service education. According to the Rules and Regulations under Sec. 532, Title IV-B, of the Higher Education Act, each local school district is eligible to apply for funding under the Teacher Center legislation. It is also incumbent upon these districts to include on their Advisory Boards representatives of the non-public schools and to meet the needs of all teachers in schools which fall within their boundaries. The Teacher Centers will have a great deal of flexibility in determining how and when the in-service education of teachers will take place, but is very important for parochial school teachers and administrators to make their needs known and to participate in the design of the centers at the local school district level. It might be added parenthetically that good communication with the local school districts should be a matter of on-going policy. The personnel assigned to the local school district offices are often very aware of new federal and state legislation and are often helpful in notifying schools of possibilities of funding under special programs. A case in point are the mini-State grants which are

offered as open competition in New York State and which add to the prestige of the local school district if the private schools succeed in obtaining these grants.

Delivery of In-Service Programs

The question of the delivery of the training process through in-service education has been a problem that is by no means relegated to the Catholic school system. There have been a variety of approaches suggested and proposals by knowledgeable experts in the field of teacher education. Some of the major concerns have been - Who is to provide the in-service education? Where is the training to take place? and finally, When? To consider all of the proposed solutions to these questions is not the discussion at hand. However, a summary of the major positions would include some of the following concepts. Teacher in-service education should be provided free of charge (no one has satisfactorily solved the problem of who is to pay), by college faculty, selected experts, or by master teachers from the schools. Some experts have proposed the creation of a new role - an on-site teacher educator based in the school district on a continuous basis. In addressing the question of where the in-service education is to take place, there is almost unanimous agreement that it should be located where it is immediately accessible to teachers. In most cases with the public schools this means in the school district office or in some similarly centrally located building. With the Catholic schools, it could be a school that has a central geographic position that is comparatively accessible for a small group of schools. The "when" of training activities has again received some agreement in that it should be after school between 3:00 and 5:00 approximately. The use of the teacher's week-end time was generally rejected and the use of time during the school day was perceived to having a detrimental effect on student learning. Moreover, the cost of substitute teachers becomes prohibitive. The who, the when, and the where of in-service education for teachers and administrators in Catholic schools has important implications for continued relevance but also critical implications for the organization of the Catholic school systems as they currently exist.

Management of In-Service

The administrative structures of the Catholic school system vis a vis the in-service education of teachers is the final issue to be considered. There are several important issues that must be addressed if in-service teacher education is to become a reality for the lay and religious teachers and administrators in the Catholic schools. Initially, there has to be some base of broad commitment to the concept of on-going teacher education from the Catholic school educators themselves. Making this issue a priority with teachers and administrators in the schools would provide support for any of the subsequent steps that would necessarily follow. Although teacher needs have been tabulated in many studies, even on a national scale, each of the various dioceses would have a specific set of priorities and these should be addressed. This is not to say that teacher needs of in-service priorities should emerge from the school office level, but that needs are unique to the area or school from which they emerge and should be teacher oriented.

Secondly, some form of geographic re-organization would be a requirement if in-service programs were to be provided within the limited time constraints of afternoon hours. This regionalization would represent a unit coordinated by a regional learning educationalist who would be responsible to the central school office at the archdiocesan level. This supervisory level person would have the task of analyzing teacher needs for in-service education in a given area and designing an appropriate program or resources to service these needs. The program specialists could be drawn from a reserve of program specialists, consultants and/or college faculty members who have agreed to provide such training activities for a consultant stipend. Much of the viability of the entire proposal rests on a financial commitment by the diocese or the input from some other source of funding.

One of the critical points of successful in-service education proposed for the parochial school system is the incentives that form an integral part of the total system. Teachers have to be recognized for their efforts at improving their skills, and although the up-dating of skills is personally rewarding, the salary scale must be adjusted to encourage the seeking of in-service training. This incentive system should function for religious as well as lay faculty. There must be some equating of professionals sharing

in a common endeavor and the incentive for pursuing in-service education must be constructed to include these rewards.

Conclusion

This comparatively brief presentation has focused on some of the contemporary problems with which the Catholic schools are confronted. Some of these issues are and concern attitudes toward the world, its resources and human interaction. Others are directed to the teaching-learning process and the relevance of theory and research for today's teachers. A process of on-going staff development must be recognized as an integral part of the educational process. A discussion of a delivery system or in-service education would necessitate more effective collaboration with public school educators and a re-thinking of the organization of the parochial school system. Finally, for the parochial school educator and administrator, in-service teacher education recognizes the importance of a shared mission in bringing the best in skills, knowledges, and attitudes as well as a moral and religious life-time commitment to children for whom knowing is part of believing and believing is part of knowing in the best of the Catholic tradition.